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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000804

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NEA/ARP, ECA/PE/C/CU, NEA/PPD(DBENZE)

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TAGS: [EINT](#) [KPAO](#) [KU](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#)  
SUBJECT: EDUCATION MINISTER: SLOW ROLLING GENDER  
SEGREGATION

REF: A. KUWAIT 769 B. KUWAIT 90

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a July 13 meeting with Minister of Education Nouriya Al-Sabeeh, the Ambassador raised the issue of gender segregation and its potential impact on mixed-gender programs in Kuwait, such as the State Department-sponsored and AMIDEAST-administered ACCESS English Language Microscholarship Program, as well as higher education. The Minister stated that she and "others" would take to court any National Assembly decision ordering gender segregation. The Minister also expressed her support for the 501 new Government of Kuwait-sponsored (GOK) scholarships designated for study in the U.S. (of a total of 1500) (Ref A). End Summary.

¶2. (C) During her initial office call on the Minister of Education at the Ministry on July 13, the Ambassador raised the issue of gender segregation in the Kuwaiti education system. (Note: As earlier reported (Ref B), Minister Al-Sabeeh had survived a 'grilling' by the National Assembly but the quid pro quo for remaining in the Cabinet was her acquiescence to gender segregation throughout Kuwait's education system. The Amir subsequently dissolved the government. End Note.) The Minister said that original plans were for the National Assembly to make a decision in October, following the month of Ramadan. Meanwhile, Al-Sabeeh has deflected calls from conservative members of Parliament for immediate implementation by citing the need for further study of the infrastructure changes and financial cost associated with implementation. She anticipated that studies would take "at least" six months.

¶3. (U) The Ambassador then asked the Minister if increased gender segregation could affect mixed-gender programs such as the ACCESS English Language Microscholarship Program, as well as the local American curriculum schools attended by diplomatic dependents. The Minister replied, "I don't think so," stating that there would be exceptions to gender segregation regulations. Moreover, she and "others" would fight such a decision in court. The Minister then lamented the shift in Kuwaiti society from her own student days in the 1960's, when mixed gender education was the norm.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador welcomed the recent announcement of a 400 percent increase in GOK-sponsored scholarships for students planning to study in the U.S. (Note: Out of the 1500 new GOK-designated scholarships, 501 will be designated for study in the U.S. End Note.) The Minister stated that this specific increase had been her "goal from the beginning."

¶5. (C) Comment: The Minister appears to be attempting to be playing a clever tactical game, stalling the implementation of gender segregation in Kuwaiti schools and universities, long enough for either a court case to stymie implementation, or for the Parliament again to be dissolved, which many (although not all) anticipate will happen come December or

January. This would explain in part another decision by the Cabinet not to delay the beginning of the academic year from the first week of September until following Ramadan, as demanded by the Salafist and ultra-conservative blocs in Parliament. If schools begins in integrated fashion, per usual, the Minister can justly argue that mid-term segregation would be disruptive, whereas a delay until October would allow for the necessary logistical adjustments for segregation. If the trend towards gender segregation were to move forward, it might have a negative impact on U.S. Embassy dependents if/when it extends to private primary and secondary schools, and could also potentially affect State Department-sponsored programs, such as ACCESS.

¶6. (C) This extremely pro-Western minister is nothing if not courageous. The feisty and upbeat Ms. Al-Sabeeh remarked that the Amir himself had discouraged her from taking the floor and offered to dissolve Parliament 'immediately' to avoid putting her on trial. She had refused, politely but categorically because as she said, "I had to protect my honor and my reputation." In the end, she delivered an impressive performance, deftly sparring with her opponents and survived a vote of confidence. Immediately following, the Amir proceeded to dissolve Parliament, but the Minister's reputation was enhanced. End Comment.

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